

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The interior of a furnace is partitioned into two longitudinally extending and transversely adjacent zones, and one of the zones is heated to a substantially higher treatment temperature than the other of the zones, which may or may not be heated. A steel workpiece is conveyed longitudinally through the furnace with a region of the workpiece moving exclusively through the one zone and another region of the workpiece moving exclusively through the other of the zones such that the regions are heated to different temperatures. The treatment temperature in one of the zone is above the  $AC_1$  point for the workpiece and the temperature in the other of the zones is close to or below the  $AC_1$  point for the workpiece.